

REMARKS

This Application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action mailed June 28, 2004. At the time of the Office Action, Claims 1-15 were pending in this Application. Claims 1-15 were rejected. Claims 1-2, 4, 6-7, 9, 11, and 14 have been amended. Claims 16-20 have been added to claim subject matter to which the Applicants are entitled. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and favorable action in this case.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §112

Claims 1-15 were rejected by the Examiner under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite and failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicants regard as the invention. Applicants have amended Claims 1-2, 4, 6-7, 9, 11, and 14 to overcome these rejections, and respectfully request full allowance of Claims 1-2, 4, 6-7, 9, 11, and 14, as well as Claims 3, 5, 8, 10, 12-13, and 15, which depend from allowable independent claims.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 1-4

Claims 1-4 were rejected by the Office under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent 5,115,547 issued to Wolfgang Rohde ("Rohde"). In response to the Office's rejection, Claim 1 has been amended to recite, "during a pause...when the slab production line is non-operational, the slab feed device supplies slabs to the rolling mill train..." Rhode does not teach or suggest an independent slab feed device that supplies slabs to a rolling mill train *when the slab production line is non-operational*. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claim 1.

Inasmuch as Claims 2-4 depend from allowable independent Claim 11, Claims 2-4 are themselves allowable. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claims 2-4.

Claims 6-8

Claims 6-8 were rejected by the Office under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent 5,115,547 issued to Wolfgang Rohde ("Rohde"). In response to the Office's rejection, Claim 6 has been amended to recite, "during a pause in production of the slab production line when the slab production line is non-operational, supplying slabs...via the slab feed device..." Rhode does not teach or suggest an independent slab feed device that supplies slabs to a rolling mill train *when the slab production line is non-operational*. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claim 6.

Inasmuch as Claims 7-8 depend from allowable independent Claim 6, Claims 7-8 are themselves allowable. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claims 2-4.

Claims 11-15

Claims 11-15 were rejected by the Office under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by European Patent Application EP0584605 listing Bruno Di Giusto et al. ("Di Giusto") as inventor. In response to the Office's rejection, Claim 11 has been amended to recite, "at least one slab feed device...independent of the slab production line, to supply slabs to the rolling mill train...when the slab production line is non-operational..." Di Giusto does not teach or suggest an independent slab feed device to supply slabs *when the slab production line is non-operational*. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claim 11.

Inasmuch as Claims 12-15 depend from allowable independent Claim 11, Claims 12-15 are themselves allowable. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claims 12-15.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 5 and 10 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Rohde in view of Di Giusto. Inasmuch as Claims 5 and 10 depend from allowable independent Claims 1 or 6, respectively, Claims 5 and 10 are themselves allowable. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claims 5 and 10.

Claim 9 and New Claims 16-18

Claim 9

Claim 9 was not specifically addressed in the previous official action. The Applicants submit, however, that Claim 9 is allowable at least because it depends from allowable independent Claim 6. The Applicants, therefore, respectfully request the Office to withdraw its rejection of Claim 9.

Claims 16-18

The Applicants have presented new Claims 16-18 to more fully claim subject matter to which the Applicants are entitled. None of the cited references teaches or suggests, alone or in combination with any other cited reference, “during a pause in production of the slab production line, supplying the thick slabs to the rolling mill train via the slab feed device...” Consequently, the cited art does not teach each and every element of independent Claim 16, and Claim 16 is allowable. Inasmuch as Claims 17 and 18 depend from allowable Claim 16, Claims 17 and 18 are themselves allowable, and such allowance is respectfully requested.

New Claims 19-20

The Applicants have presented new Claims 19-20 to more fully claim subject matter to which the Applicants are entitled. None of the cited references teaches or suggests, alone or in combination with any other cited reference, “using a slab feed device to supply the rolling mill train only during a time the at least one slab production line is stopped.” Consequently, the cited art does not teach each and every element of independent Claim 19, and Claim 19 is allowable. Inasmuch as Claim 20 depends from allowable Claim 19, Claim 20 is itself allowable, and such allowance is respectfully requested.

Change of Correspondence

Applicants have enclosed a Change of Correspondence Address form for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's records. Applicants respectfully request that the correspondence address be updated accordingly.

CONCLUSION

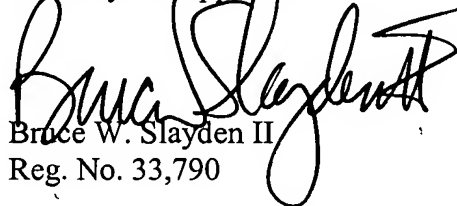
Applicants have now made an earnest effort to place this case in condition for allowance in light of the amendments and remarks set forth above. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of Claims 1-15, as amended, and initial allowance of Claims 16-19.

Applicants have enclosed a check in the amount of \$172.00 for the two independent claims which have been added herein. Applicants believe there are no additional fees due, however, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 50-2148 of Baker Botts L.L.P.

If there are any matters concerning this Application that may be cleared up in a telephone conversation, please contact Applicant's attorney at 512.322.2606.

Respectfully submitted,

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